

Buy Recycled and Close the Loop

Maine State Planning Office

Waste Management & Recycling Program



For recycling to succeed, we must do more than just set our recyclables at the curb or drop them off. We must also purchase products made from recycled materials. When we buy recycled, we help to create healthy markets for the materials we recycle at home. So, buying recycled is a key part of the recycling “loop.”

You may be surprised to learn that you have been buying recycled for years! Most cereal boxes, aluminum and steel cans, and glass bottles have recycled content. Many bathroom tissues and paper towels are also made with recycled paper.

Make Your Dollars Count

Consumer spending makes up two-thirds of the Gross National Product. That’s you, the everyday shopper. By choosing products with recycled content, you are telling manufacturers that you prefer recycled products and that they should produce more of these products.

Why Buy Recycled?

1. Buying Recycled Conserves Natural Resources

Natural resources are limited and often difficult to extract from the earth. When products are made from recycled materials, manufacturers are using every tree, every gallon of oil, every pound of minerals to its maximum potential. If we use something just once and throw it away, we are wasting those resources.

2. Buying Recycled Reduces Waste and Pollution

Manufacturing a product from “virgin” materials creates a lot of waste and pollution. Some of that waste goes into landfills or incinerators, some of it is released into the air, and still more goes into the water supply.

Manufacturing that same product from recycled materials creates far less waste and emissions.

3. Buying Recycled Conserves Energy

The energy savings from manufacturing a product with recycled materials rather than “virgin” materials can be substantial. For example, it takes 95% less energy to manufacture an aluminum can from recycled aluminum than from “virgin” materials.

4. Buying Recycled Creates Jobs

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Washington, D.C. estimates that nine jobs are created for every 15,000 tons of solid waste recycled into a new product, and seven jobs for the same amount of yard trimmings composted. By contrast, only two jobs are created for every 15,000 tons incinerated, and just one job for every 15,000 tons sent to landfills.

5. Buying Recycled Builds Environmental Ethic

When we incorporate the purchase of recycled products into everyday shopping habits, we communicate to our children, to manufacturers, to retailers, to elected officials, and others an important message: we want to play a productive role in helping to ensure a positive future for our families, our communities, and our planet.

Myths About Buying Recycled

1. Recycled products are hard to find.

Many recycled products, from groceries to office supplies to toys and gifts, can be found where you are currently shopping. Major national chains, such as K-Mart, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and others, sell hundreds of products made from or packaged in recycled material. So do many smaller chains, like Shaw’s and Shop ‘n Save, and independent retailers, like your local general store. You can also find many specialized products through mail order catalogs and on the Internet.

2. Recycled products cost more.

Many recycled products are priced competitively with their non-recycled counterparts. Although some recycled products do cost more, an increase in consumer demand will enable manufacturers of recycled products to lower their manufacturing costs and start passing those savings on to customers.

3. Recycled products are inferior in quality.

There are inferior and superior products in all categories, and recycled products are no exception. Overall, recycled products enjoy the same quality, reliability and dependability as virgin products. Like anything else, you just need to try a few different products until you find what you like.

Tips for Buying Recycled

Buying recycled isn't difficult. Even though products are not always identified as containing recycled material, reading labels is still the best way to find most recycled products. When looking for recycled products, keep the following in mind

- **Post-consumer** materials include any items that have been used by consumers or businesses and collected for recycling. **Pre-consumer** materials include "waste" items generated during manufacturing, such as paper trimmings at paper mills, which almost always end up being recycled anyway. By choosing products with the highest percentage of *post-consumer* materials, we support our local recycling collection programs.
- **Recycled vs. Recyclable:** These terms can be very confusing. A **recycled** product is one made from recycled material, and is the focus of this fact sheet. A **recyclable** product is one that can be collected, separated, or otherwise recovered and recycled after it has reached the end of its useful life. While it is important to look for both recycled and recyclable products, buying a "recyclable" product only has meaning if you can, and will, actually recycle it in your community.
- **Make sure you are comparing apples to apples.** Sometimes the recycled product may appear to be more expensive because of differences in size or quantity. With toilet paper, for example, the recycled brands usually have many more sheets per roll than the "virgin" brands, so it appears more expensive when actually you are getting more of the product and in more efficient packaging.
- **Speak up.** The more store managers are made aware of your interest in buying recycled, the more they will pay attention to product labels and ask for recycle products from their suppliers and distributors.

For more information, please contact:

State Planning Office
Waste Management and Recycling Program
State House Station 38
Augusta, Maine 04333-0038
(207) 287-8934 or 1-800-662-4545
www.recyclemaine.com